

GENUINE WORSHIP – Isaiah 6:1-8

Practicing the Presence of God #2

Back when the telegraph was the fastest means of long-distance communication, a certain Western Union office had an opening for a Morse code operator. The office manager put an ad in the newspaper giving a time and day when applications for the job would be taken. Answering the ad in the newspaper, a certain young man went to the address that was listed. When he arrived, he entered a large, noisy office filled with aspiring applicants. In the background as would be expected in a Western Union office, a telegraph clicked away. There was a sign on the receptionist's counter instructing job applicants to fill out a form and wait until they were summoned to enter the inner office. It didn't take the young man long to fill out the application form. And he soon found himself sitting with the many other applicants, killing time. Some of the applicants began to talk with each other. Most just read papers or magazines that were lying around the office. After a few minutes, the young man startled the other applicants by suddenly standing up, crossing the room to the door of the inner office, and walking right in without knocking. Naturally the other applicants perked up, wondering what was going on. Why had this man been so bold? They muttered among themselves that they hadn't been summonsed yet. They took more than a little satisfaction in assuming that the young man who went into the office was just impatient and would be reprimanded for his presumption and dismissed without serious consideration. "There would be one less challenge for the job opening," they consoled themselves. But within just a few minutes the young man emerged from the

inner office escorted by the office manager, who announced to the other applicants, "Gentlemen, thank you very much for coming, but the job has just been filled by this young man." The other applicants began grumbling to each other, and then one spoke up, "Wait a minute--I don't understand. He was the last one to come in, and we never even got a chance to be interviewed. Yet he got the job. That's not fair."

The employer responded, "While you have been sitting out here waiting, I have been in the inner office with a telegraph clicking out the following message: "If you understand this message, then come right in. The job is yours." This young man was the only person to hear that message and follow it. He is the man that I want to be my Morse Code operator because he has an ear tuned to telegraph messages.

We all are sensitive to different frequencies in life. The wave length that we are in tune to often determines how competent we are in a given field. An expert auto mechanic listens to a car engine run and can hear faulty valves click that the rest of us are oblivious to. A good doctor listens to a patient detail some symptoms and he is able to discern an ailment that the rest of us would overlook. So it is in the life of a Christian who is growing and maturing with the Lord – there needs to be a sensitivity to the Presence of God in his or her life.

When the Lord Jesus Christ was preparing his followers for His departure, he told them that it was good for them that He was leaving this world because His departure would usher in a new age where each and every believer would

experience the indwelling presence of the Spirit of God in his or her life. On the very night that He was betrayed, Jesus said to His disciples:

"Now I am going to him who sent me . . . But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. (John 16:5,7)

Now this promise that Jesus made to His followers just before His atoning death was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost when the Spirit of God came to indwell each and every believer who had assembled in that upper room in Jerusalem. Ever since that day, at the moment a Christian is born again into the family of God, the 3rd person of the triune Godhead indwells that individual with the very presence of God Himself. In fact, this is one of the distinguishing characteristics of one who is a true member of God's family. The Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Rome:

If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. (Rom. 8:9)

Now it is true than there are many Christians who are ignorant of this blessing of the indwelling presence of God that has been given to them. When Paul wrote to the church at Corinth whose members were struggling with many sins and inconsistencies in their lives, he said:

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

(1 Cor. 6:19,20)

But even though they were ignorant of this blessing, they still had it. There are no second class Christians in God's family – every person who is truly born again has the indwelling presence of God.

It is critically important that each of us realize this important Biblical truth and experience the presence of God in our lives on a daily basis for this will to a great extent determine our growth and maturity in our walk with God.

We have begun a series looking at how experiencing the presence of God will affect various aspects of our lives. This morning, we want to address the important area of worship. One of the purposes of our creation is to give praise and glory to our creator. We do this when we worship. But many people come to worship God out of a sense of duty or habit or as an opportunity to fellowship with their friends. How can we be sure that we are experiencing the presence of God in our worship? How can we know that we have met God in spirit and truth this morning?

We want to look at an individual in the Bible who was given a special, miraculous vision of God's presence. He was a prophet of God named Isaiah. Specifically, we want to see together how Isaiah's awareness of God's presence affected his life. I believe that if we experience the presence of God in worship, our lives will be affected in a similar way. This can be a way that we evaluate our worship experience.

In this experience of the Presence of God that Isaiah wrote about in the 6th chapter of the prophecy that bears his name, there are 3 responses that are evident in Isaiah's life. We want to look at these "looks" that Isaiah had together this morning, for I believe that their progression is what we each can

experience when we have a true encounter with God in worship. For even though very few in the history of the human race have been privileged to see an authentic vision of God, we all have the privilege of having a personal encounter with God every time we come together in worship, whether it be public or private worship.

Note first of all with me Isaiah's upward look. READ Isaiah 6:1-4:

ISA 6:1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³ And they were calling to one another:

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his glory."

ISA 6:4 At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

Now the setting of this vision is most interesting. Uzziah was the 5th good king of Judah during the period of the divided kingdom in Israel's history. He is also called by the name Azariah in the Bible.

Uzziah enjoyed a long and prosperous reign. He was king for 52 years. And Uzziah accomplished much for the good of his people. He built a strong economy so that his people enjoyed a lengthy period of prosperity. He built a formidable military defense so that his people enjoyed peace and security. ²

times in the Chronicles account it tells us that Uzziah was famous and powerful. His fame spread throughout the entire Middle East and all the way south into Egypt. Comparative studies of Jewish kings show that during Uzziah's reign, Judah and Israel together came the closest to approximating the dominance that King David had achieved. There was no other time during the divided monarchy when the Jewish people enjoyed as much prosperity and peace than they had during the years when Uzziah reigned.

But Uzziah didn't end very well. His successes went to his head and his heart and head became puffed up in pride. He became so arrogant during the closing years of his life that he did the unthinkable – he forced his way into the holy place of the temple and tried to offer a personal sacrifice on the altar of incense. No fewer than 81 priests tried to stop him, but they were no match for Uzziah's power. But God stopped Uzziah in an instant. As Uzziah was stretching out his hand to offer incense on the holy altar, God struck the arrogant king with leprosy. When the priests saw the leprosy break out on Uzziah's forehead, they hurried him out of the temple area. Uzziah had to move from the royal palace and live humbly in a leprous colony outside of the city walls until the day of his death.

It was not happenstance that it was in the year of Uzziah's death that the prophet Isaiah had this vision of the Lord. Uzziah had been a powerful and glorious king who had become puffed up in his own arrogance. He represented the greatest pinnacle that a human being could achieve. But God in one touch had humbled Uzziah and removed all of his power and glory. Now Isaiah had this vision in the year that Uzziah died as a leper. Isaiah couldn't have helped

comparing the incomparable greatness of Almighty God with the best that a human could achieve in this world when he was privileged to be ushered into the very throne room of God in heaven.

We all have a tendency to become impressed with those who achieve here on this earth. The businessman who gathers almost unlimited wealth, the athlete who performs seemingly super-human feats, a glorious Hollywood production that makes a fantasy seem so real, the President of our country who is often referred to by media types as the most powerful person in the whole world. It is very important for us to often refocus our perspective in life. There is nothing that even begins to approximate the power and glory of Almighty God. He is the one who is surrounded by angelic beings continuously offering praises to his name. He is the one who fills the whole earth with his glory. He is the one who is the standard of holiness. When we experience the presence of God in worship, we see just a little bit more of God's awesome power and holiness.

Now it is interesting that everyone in the Bible who has had the kind of upward look that Isaiah had immediately has an inward look that followed. Becoming aware of the awesome greatness of God brings an intense awareness of our human frailties and sinful condition. Look again with me at Isaiah's reaction in verses 5-7:

ISA 6:5 "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."

ISA 6:6 Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

Now the details of Isaiah's vision are especially interesting again in light of the experience that King Uzziah had late in his life. Remember, Isaiah had this vision in the year Uzziah died. And you will recall that Uzziah's great sin in his pride and arrogance was to go into the holy place of the temple and attempt to offer a fragrant sacrifice on the golden altar of incense. God struck Uzziah with leprosy as he attempted this arrogant act in the temple.

Now the law of God gave very specific instructions concerning how the fragrant sacrifices were to be made on the golden altar of incense. The spices that were to be used were carefully described – gum, resin, onycha, galbanum and frankincense all in equal amounts. This mixture was only to be used in the temple and not for any other personal use by the priests. And it was also specifically instructed that the fire for the altar of incense was to come from coals burning on the great bronze altar where all of the animal sacrifices were made. No other fire was acceptable. You might recall that when Nadab and Abihu tried to use unauthorized fire to burn the incense, the fire came out and consumed them so that they died. The symbolism is very clear here. The great bronze altar pictures sacrifices for sins. This is where the animals that pictured the Lord Jesus Christ were offered for atonement for sins. The golden altar of incense in the temple pictures prayer. It is only after we have been forgiven for

our sins and have entered into a personal relationship with God that we can then fellowship with Him through prayer and experience the presence of God in our lives. So the coals to light the incense altar must come from the bronze altar of sacrifice. Uzziah didn't regard God's instructions to be important and he paid for his arrogance with his life. Uzziah even though he wasn't a priest tried to offer an incense sacrifice himself. Uzziah didn't use the proper procedures that God had instructed. So God struck him with leprosy and he died. Now in the year of his death, Isaiah has this vision. He is overwhelmed with the holiness and glory of God to the point where he actually feels that he is going to die. That is what *Woe is me, I am ruined* literally means. The Hebrew word used literally means to be *cut off or destroyed*. Isaiah thought that his personal death was imminent. He was so overcome with the greatness and majesty of God that he didn't see how he could possibly go on living in his sinful condition. But in Isaiah's despair, God sends one of the angels, one of the seraphs, to take a coal from the altar. This is a beautiful picture of God's forgiveness. The coal touches the prophet's lips that he had just confessed to be unclean and there is immediate forgiveness and cleansing.

One can't help but compare the arrogance of King Uzziah who had attempted offering a sacrifice of incense in an unauthorized way with the humility of Isaiah who upon seeing the Lord confesses his sin and moral defilement. But that is the difference between one who is puffed up in pride and one who is experiencing the presence of God in his life. Whereas God condemned the arrogance of King Uzziah by immediately striking him with

leprosy, God reaches out in love and compassion to Isaiah forgiving his sins and cleansing him from his defilement.

The Bible says that God opposes the proud, but He gives grace to the humble. It's a fearful prospect to face God as an opponent. But what comfort it brings to know God as the merciful giver of grace. As we humble ourselves before God, seeing ourselves as we really are compared to his awesome holiness, God is willing to meet us in our weakness so that we might receive His cleansing power and strength.

Having had an upward look and an inward look, Isaiah is now ready to have an outward look. Notice is with me in verse 8 as we read the account of Isaiah's call to be a prophet.

ISA 6:8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"

And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

We find here the second implied reference to the triune godhead in this passage. We realize that the full revelation of the trinity is found in the New Testament. It is in the N.T. that we find the godhead revealed as 3 distinct persons who are one in being or essence – God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit all equally one in being God. Probably one of the reasons why the triunity of the godhead wasn't clearly revealed during the O.T. days was the simple fact that Israel always lived surrounded by polytheistic people.

Every nation surrounding Israel worshipped many, many gods. It was a great enough temptation for Israel to remain true to Jehovah as it was with just the

unity of God being emphasized. It is interesting that it was only after the battle against polytheism was completely won during the Babylonian captivity that God introduced further revelation of Himself being a triune God in fuller detail in the New Testament.

But having said that, there are some times in the O.T. when the triunity of God is implied. This is one of them. The seraphim surrounding the throne of God cried out *Holy, Holy, Holy* – 3 times, once for each of the persons of the Godhead. Even though the verb that is used indicates a continuous chorus of exclaiming the holiness of God, 3 specific times God’s holiness is proclaimed. “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord Almighty”. And here in verse 8, God has a conversation among Himself signifying that there must be more than one person to the Godhead. *Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?* God can’t be talking to the angels surrounding Him for they are simply ministering servants. Prophets on earth do not represent them. Prophets on earth do not serve them. No, God is discussing among Himself. The unity is found in the singular pronoun – *Whom shall I send?* The triunity is found in the following plural pronoun – *and who will go for us?*

The sequence of Isaiah’s calling is important to note. That little word *then* emphasizes it at the beginning of verse 8. It is only after Isaiah has experienced the presence of God in a personal way and has become painfully aware of his sinful condition to the point where he confesses it and receives God’s cleansing that he is now ready to be considered for service for the Lord. While none of us has probably had the exact kind of vision that Isaiah had, the sequence is still

important for us to note. For we will only be effective in God's service as we go forth in the spirit and humility that Isaiah had.

I read this past week that our country is the only country in the world where the church is not growing today. I don't know whether this statement is true or not, but if it is I think there are clear reasons for this. It's not that we don't have enough Christians – our country is filled with millions of believers. But the general concept of who God is has been so watered down over the past decades that I think it has had an impact on the church in our country. The general picture of God in most Americans' minds is a gentle, loving, compassionate, forgiving being kind of like an elderly grandfather. Now the Bible does speak of God in all of these terms. But God has many other attributes that are totally ignored today. The Bible also uses characteristics such as holiness, righteousness, power, wrath, and even vengeance to describe God. But you seldom hear these terms used in connection with God in our country today. The result is a de-clawed God. Just like a powerful lion is de-clawed so that a trainer can be confident and fearless being in a cage with it and the end result is that the lion loses its power and becomes a servant to the trainer for some circus show, so our culture has tried to de-claw God so that we feel more confident and fearless in his presence. And the end result is that God has lost his power in the public eye and has become a servant to the human race. Our culture even feels so bold as to ridicule and make fun of God and his church and his program that should be respected and revered as being holy.

We don't have to look any farther to illustrate this fact than to turn on our T.V. sets. NBC, one of the major 3 T.V. networks in our country, has just

introduced what they claim to be a serious drama about Christian people and the Christian faith called “The Book of Daniel”. The main character in this T.V. series is Daniel Webster, a drug-addicted Episcopal priest whose alcoholic wife can’t get through the day without her mid-day martini. Rev. Webster regular talks to a white-robed, bearded Jesus. The Webster family is rounded out by a 23 year old openly gay son, a 16 year old drug-dealing daughter, and a 16 year old adopted son who is having a regular affair with the bishop’s daughter. The lesbian church secretary is also having an affair with Webster’s sister-in-law. Now NBC feels that they are doing a service to the religious community by introducing this “church” program to their viewers. And evidently the Burlington Coat Factory, Just for Men products, H & R Block and the Mazda car company agree because they purchased the advertising time so that this program could be aired on January 6. But their view of God and his program is just a joke. WBIR, an NBC affiliate in Knoxville, gathered the local ministerial association to preview the first episode. Here are some of the comments that these pastors of all faith made after the viewing. “It’s very demeaning to Christianity”, “It’s an assault on the Christian faith”, “It’s a pretty sorry piece of work”, “they’re portraying something as normal that is just absurd”, “they’ve demeaned my faith and diminished the person I worship.”

Now I don’t think that this program is going to be on the air long. It’s so out of touch with reality that it won’t be accepted by the American people. But it shows just how perverted and distorted the view of God is by the media leaders in our country. And as the general population is continuously bombarded by this kind of perversion, it just can’t help but have an affect as to

how God is viewed. Sadly, even Christians who know God's truth are often affected by this assault of the enemy.

Some time ago I read a story about a Chicago business man who was taking a native American on a tour of the million dollar mile. The Indian had never been in a large city before and was speechless as he looked up at the John Hancock building. But all of a sudden, the native American stopped in his tracks and said, *I hear a cricket*. The business man was dumfounded. How can you hear a cricket with all of the noise and bustle around us? But the Indian was not to be deterred. He looked around for a few moments and soon he had found a single cricket in a small island of grass in the midst of that concrete jungle. Now the businessman was impressed. *What keen ears you must have?* he complemented. *Not really*, the native American replied. *Give me some change from your pocket*. To the amazement of the businessman, the Indian took the change and just threw it out, scattering it on the sidewalk. Immediately, a dozen people who had been hurrying past them stopped in their tracks and looked back to see the coins that had just hit the pavement. *It's not how keen one's ears are*, the Native American instructed. *It's what you are listening for that is most important*.

Are you listening to the voice of God in your life? Or have you become so busy in the hustle and bustle of life that you can only hear the voice of your stock broker or foreman or news anchor? If we are experiencing the presence of God in our lives we will be in tune to what God is saying and doing – this can't help but affect our worship.